

The Bank Fraud Task Force

The Bank Fraud Task Force was created by the Law Enforcement Coordinating Committee White Collar Crime Sub-Committee in March 1992. Current members of the Bank Fraud Task Force are the Phoenix Police Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Maricopa County Attorney's Office, the Arizona Attorney General's Office, and the United States Attorney's Office.

The purpose of the task force was to form a multi-jurisdictional group of investigators to address the problem of bank fraud in Maricopa County. It was designed to address those cases that were often relegated to a low priority or ignored altogether because the activity spanned several jurisdictions, or involved many unidentified subjects and few leads, other than a cold paper trail. In most instances, the average bank robber netted \$700 and was caught within 24 hours, yet the average check scam involved losses of more than \$2,000, the perpetrators were seldom caught, and there were more than one hundred times as many check cases as bank robberies. Many bank fraud suspect were able to elude arrest by furnishing false identification documents when cashing stolen, forged, or counterfeited checks. Bank fraud was truly a problem for which there was no solution in 1992.

Since the inception of the Task Force approximately 10,000 criminal referrals have been received from Arizona financial institutions. The losses described in those referrals exceed 60 Million Dollars. Since its inception in 1992 the Task Force has instituted more that 1600 investigations, resulting in 606 indictments, 604 convictions, and obtained court orders for restitution in excess of Nine and One-half Million Dollars.

In addition to its efforts at investigating, apprehending, and prosecuting bank fraud, the Task Force has engaged in proactive crime prevention efforts. Most notable among these efforts was the "Check Print" program instituted by Arizona banks. This program involved participation by bank tellers at the time of the transaction in an effort to get a positive identification of the customer. Banks required non-bank customers negotiating checks to provide a thumb print on the negotiated check for identification purposes. With this positive identification, it has been much easier to identify, arrest, and successfully prosecute bank fraud scams.

The Bank Fraud Task Force is considered one of the most successful bank fraud task forces in the country by FBI headquarters and used as a model for other FBI offices throughout the United States. Without the cooperation of all of the agencies and departments participating in the Task Force, most bank fraud cases would go unaddressed.